



Agricultural Land Preservation Program Howard County, Maryland



TENANT HOUSE CHANGES

As many of you know, the Agricultural Land Preservation Program (ALPP) has been working with representatives of the agricultural community for over a year on potential changes to the regulations that govern tenant houses on property under ALPP easement. The effort was initiated through discussions with the Economic Development Authority's (EDA) Agriculture Committee. Conceptually, the committee wanted to address two major issues: the eligibility of part-time farm employees for tenant housing and the potential for abuse of tenant house rights in the absence of guidelines for tenant house size.

As a result of the collaborative effort with the committee, the ALPP introduced legislation last fall to amend the agricultural preservation section of the County Code to allow part-time employees to be eligible for tenant housing and to give the Agricultural Land Preservation Board (ALPB) the authority to review tenant house requests for appropriate size. Members of the ag community expressed their concern to the County Council that the amendments as proposed would change the contracts that property owners signed with the County without their consent, and would give the ALPB review authority that was too broad. Although there was also support for the proposal, the Council tabled the legislation to allow additional discussion on a specific size limit.

Subsequently, the ALPP consulted with farm community representatives regarding an alternate proposal to amend the Zoning Regulations to limit tenant house size to 2,500 square feet, a change that would have affected all tenant houses, not just those on land in preservation. Some people expressed support for this approach as a more equitable way to regulate tenant houses. Others felt that the County should not try to address an ALPP issue by affecting property owners who are not in the program.

Based on the lack of consensus within the farm community about the best approach to address the tenant house issue, the County Administration and the ALPP staff no longer intend to propose any changes to the laws or policies affecting tenant house rights at this time.